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Edmund Quincy

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# THE MOVING POWER.

A

# DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

## FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITARIAN CHURCH

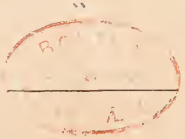
IN PHILADELHHIA,

SUNDAY MORNING, FEB. 9, 1851,

AFTER THE OCCURRENCE OF A FUGITIVE SLAVE CASE.

BY

W. H. FURNESS.



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# DISCOURSE.

GALAT. IV. XVIII.

"IT IS GOOD TO BE ZEALOUSLY AFFECTED ALWAYS IN A GOOD THING."

And not only so; it is quite impossible to effect anything in life, without the due degree of feeling, without a zealous interest in it. A man must be in earnest. As you cannot set a steam engine going without making a fire, so you cannot get the power necessary to the achievement of what you undertake, unless you have what may be called, and what really is, an enthusiasm about it. The successful men are always the men who are really interested in what they attempt; and no others. They love their work. They are inspired by a passion, and a passion so strong and so steady, that it takes away from labor all its irksomeness, and gives to self-denial the sweetness of self-gratification, and converts self-sacrifice into an exquisite luxury. Unless it is so with us, precisely so, or rather, only as it is so, can we gain our ends.

My friends, is not this all very plain? Is it not universally true, true in regard to all undertakings? To imagine that any object of human pursuit can be secured without interest in it—is it not as absurd as to think of seeing without eyes, or living without air?

But it is emphatically true—what I have just said—in the case

of all things of a great moral or religious character. Whatever we engage in, having reference to the inmost life of us, to the growth of our being up to its appointed stature, in fine, to the salvation and perfection of the soul, must be engaged in in earnest, with the heart, or it will come to nothing. As a tree cannot grow, but must of necessity wither and die, without a root, so we have no force, we can have none, there is none for us anywhere, except it comes out of our hearts.

Accordingly the appeal of Christianity is directly and mainly, not to our reason, but to the heart. While it requires us to do certain things and forbids us to do others, still its first and great commandment is Love, the Love of God and man; and Love is, not an exertion of the muscles, not a conclusion of the understanding, but a feeling, an affection, a passion. It is the affection, in and through which we are to find all the strength requisite for doing and for refraining to do. When, therefore, the aim is our own improvement or the good of others, the indispensable preliminary is that we should cherish it with enthusiasm. We can do nothing for it, we are as helpless as the dead in their graves, we may talk and reason about it till the day of doom, and flatter ourselves that we understand all about it, that no one understands it better, and we may, in fact, understand it as completely as it can be understood, and yet if we do not feel, if we are not in a glow here at the heart, it is all to no purpose. Not an effort can be made, not a step taken, not a finger stirred. We end where we began. We remain just as we were, fastened to the spot, with nothing to overcome the dead force of gravitation.

And here, by the way, the reason is made very apparent, why it is that we are all so prone to question and deny the possibility of accomplishing any great object, the abolition of great wrongs, the realization of great benefits. There are very few men who cherish any confident hope of the success of any object of this kind; and still fewer who actually believe that such things can be ac-

complished. And, at one point of view, we hardly see how to account for this absence of faith and hope in the practicability of great purposes. Here we are in the midst of an immeasurable Universe, all the arrangements of which point to good. Everything tends to the welfare of God's creatures. Nothing exists for evil and evil only. The evil that does exist conduces, or may be made to conduce, to good. How significantly, for instance, do all the aspects of Nature express the beauty, and all the elements thereof assert the glory of Liberty! Its voice is heard in the roar of the unfettered ocean, in the murmurs of every wind that blows. It sounds among the mountains, setting all their echoes to its music. It sings in the song of every bird that floats in the free air. All things combine to announce and magnify it. And yet, notwithstanding the manifest omnipresence of an Almighty and Beneficent Power, we have no faith, scarcely any thing that can be called a hope, in the emancipation of the enslaved, in the elevation of our race. We doubt and deny the possibility of such things, or our admission of it is very cold and faint. We doubt and deny it, not because we are ignorant, not because we do not know that the predominating purpose and power of things is good, and that everything is fitted to promote the diffusion and increase of good, but because we have no knowledge through our own consciousness, (the only way in which such knowledge can be had, or is so much as possible,) of that feeling, that earnest interest, which alone generates the force, which alone is the force, by which the wrong is abolished and the right rendered victorious. Our understandings may be perfectly satisfied. To the eye of our reason, it may be very clear that wrong is wrong, and right is right; and we may see also and be convinced that God is always working through all the laws and forces of nature to advance the good and bring the evil to an end, still we have no faith, no hope; and our counsel consequently is that things should be let alone; and our knees are weak and our hands hang down. The plain fact is, we are

strangers to that mightiest force in nature by which evil is defeated, and good made triumphant. We have no real concern for what is good. We actually care little or nothing about mankind; we are cold and indifferent, devoid of the enthusiasm for Truth which is the only power in existence that can enthrone her in the world.

Once in a while, at long intervals, men make their appearance, uncultivated, ignorant men perhaps, to all human seeming, obscure, solitary, with no remarkable powers of mind, scarcely possessing any gift of utterance, but with large and fiery hearts; and they not only see the Right, they feel it—they feel it like a material presence, like a consuming flame in their bosoms. It is no matter of cold speculation with them, but an object of their idolizing affection. They love it with their whole souls. And in the conscious power of their love, they have a hope and a faith so strong and so inspiring that they engage in the cause of the Right with a vigor that carries all before it, and fling down the gauntlet to all the world's wisdom and power, and, in the unequal conflict win immortal victories, and crowns of 'blinding' and imperishable glory. Such an one was the Apostle Paul, who said: 'I know that bonds and afflictions await me, but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.' "There is something exceedingly majestic in the steadiness with which the Apostle points out the single object of his life, and the unquenchable courage with which he walks towards it. 'I know that I shall die, but I have a greater object than life, the zeal of a high duty. Situation allows some men to think of safety; I not only must not consult it, but must go where I know it will be most exposed. I must hold out my hands for chains, my body for stripes, and my soul for misery. I am ready to do it all.' These are the feelings," continues the eloquent writer whom I quote, "by which alone bold truths

have been told to the world; by which the bondage of falsehood has been broken and the chains of slavery snapt asunder! It is in vain to talk of men numerically; if the passions of a man are exalted to a summit like this, he is a thousand men! If all the feebleness and fluctuation of his nature are shamed away, you must not pretend to calculate upon his efforts. Under the influence of sublime feelings, sometimes liberty, sometimes religious men, have sprung up from the dust, to shiver the oldest dominions; to toss to the ground the highest despots; to astonish ages to come with the immensity and power and grandeur of human feelings. In all desperate situations, these are the feelings that must rescue us; when prudence is mute, when reason is baffled, when all the ordinary resources of discretion are exhausted and dried up—there is no safety but in heroic passions, no hope but in sublime men."*

Is it any wonder now that we have no faith in the force of Truth and the success of Right, when we know nothing of the power to serve them, which only affection can supply, which can be supplied in no other way, from no other quarter on earth or in heaven, and which alone can make their triumph certain?

We may ridicule and despise enthusiasm and call it by all sorts of disparaging names, yet it is the life and hope of mankind, the central and moving power. Without it all things would go to decay, tumble into ruins. It is the source of all human energy. It is the breath of the Almighty, the wind and fire from heaven, which, when once fairly abroad in the hearts of men, will sweep away and consume all opposition, the mightiest that can be mustered.

*Sidney Smith. According to the estimate of the State of Georgia, William Lloyd Garrison would seem to be one of these rare men. For he scarcely opened his lips on the subject of Slavery before that great State offered $5000 for his head, surmising with the instinctive sagacity of fear that it carried in it the Abolition of that mighty Wrong.

So manifest is this from all that we know of human nature and from all the lessons of history, that when this whole-hearted affection appears in the world, when any number of men, however small, nay, when only one man, no matter how humble, is fully possessed with it, to resist him is a great deal worse than in vain. The world may as well lay down its arms with what stomach it can, and acknowledge its conqueror, and come to terms with him at once. There is no putting him down. There is no putting him off. He will command, and what is more, he will be obeyed. He may be persecuted, but he cannot be silenced; for he will compel his very persecutors to be the vociferous heralds of his fame. He may be crucified, but he cannot be conquered; he will turn the cross on which he bleeds into a throne, and kings shall come and bow to it. He may be chained to the stake and burned; and the light of the fire that consumes his body shall flash down the coming ages, a beacon-light to generations. You may scatter his ashes to the winds; and they shall be as seed, sown by the mighty hand of God, from which shall spring an immortal harvest of saints and heroes. Put forth your utmost power against him and grind him into dust, and there shall roll up a cloud of incense to fill and ravish and purify and hallow the world with the odor of its sanctity.

Seeing then that zeal, enthusiasm, love, or whatever it may be called, is the grand motive power, without which Religion with all its ceremonies, and Reason and Philosophy with all their wisdom are as inefficient as so much mechanism of wood and iron, we find ourselves confronted with a question of indescribable importance to every soul of man. And this question is simply this: How shall we get this feeling? How shall we become inspired with the ardor necessary to the salvation of our souls and the deliverance of the world from the bondage of evil?

We fully admit the absolute necessity of being in earnest, if we

are to effect anything for ourselves and for others. We know that we must love God with our utmost strength, and our brother as we love ourselves. We must love Truth and Mercy and Justice with our whole hearts. And when we are told to do so, we answer: 'We want to love God and all that is good, and Christ and his spirit and his precepts as we love our friends and our children, and our ease, and even more than we love these. We would that the Best stood the Highest in our affections.'

But we say, we cannot love, merely because we are commanded to love, or because we want to love. You might as well command us to eat and drink with a relish; if we are not hungry or thirsty, all the commanding in the world will be of no avail. You may lecture to us never so eloquently about the advantages of eating and drinking, and tell us how they conduce to health and strength, and explain to us the structure of the body, and show us the importance of nourishment; and what is more, we may listen to you with the greatest patience, and our reason may be perfectly convinced that it is beneficial and necessary that we should take food, but we do not immediately become hungry and thirsty in consequence. We may wish that we were hungry and athirst, but all our mere wishing, however strongly expressed, will not make us so. We may still, after all, loathe food or be entirely indifferent to it. Is there not a complete analogy here, between the body and the soul? You may tell us of the divinity of truth, and of being true, and of the beauty of holiness, and satisfy our understandings of the necessity and obligation of loving the right and the good with a perfect love, yet it does not necessarily follow that we cherish that love. We cannot desire what is good, merely because we desire to desire it. We cannot hunger for righteousness, merely because we should so like to be hungry for it. All our mere wishing will not of itself alone create the spiritual appetite. I cannot leap at once into the possession of faith and love, by a simple act of my own will.

So true is all this, so evident is it that we cannot cherish a desire, merely because we wish to cherish it, or because we are convinced that we ought to cherish it, that there really seems to be no little plausibility in the doctrine which teaches that we can do nothing for ourselves, that we only sin when we attempt it, that we must wait for the sovereign grace of God to do for us what is needed.

And truly such would seem to be the case, most especially when we see, as we may, that, when God is doing a great deal for us, we still seem to have no power to do anything for ourselves; that, when the Holy Spirit of his Mercy darts its thrilling appeals, like lightnings out of Heaven, into our inmost hearts, those hearts remain cold and hard as adamant, and scarcely one poor drop of human feeling oozes therefrom. What have we just beheld? Into this community, which so significantly expresses through its numerous Churches and its Sabbaths to want to love God and man, into this free, Christian, and praying community comes a man, and drags a fellow-creature before our courts, a being made by the same God that made us all, God-endowed, a woman and a mother, and lays claim to her as his property, which he has a perfect right to sell and treat like any beast of burden; and this too, as if to give the greatest possible aggravation to the case, after she has enjoyed almost a quarter of a century of freedom; and men stand forth amongst us to assist in the prosecution of this inhuman claim! And was the community kindled at once into a flame of excited pity and indignation? Has anybody lost his appetite or his sleep? Were we born of woman? Did we feed from our mothers' breasts? Is there any touch of humanity in us? Can we so much as weep? It hardly appears. It is true we shook our heads and said that we were very sorry, that it was a great pity, but we soon comforted ourselves with saying, that at the worst the poor creature would not be sent back into bondage, that she would be bought off, that the despised friends of the slave, the Abolition-

ists, whom we denounce, would see to it that she was taken care of. But where, where was that storm of public indignation that should have broken forth with terrific power, more like the power of God than the power of man, if we had any love of humanity in us, at the bare idea of so monstrous a claim? Where is the intolerable shame that should bow down our heads to the dust at the thought of the sacred soil of this Free State of Pennsylvania turned into a very Guinea coast, a hunting ground, where human beings are the game and mothers are torn from their children? Where is that love of Mercy and of Freedom that such events as this should awaken into such power that we should rush together in a mass, with one heart and voice, solemnly to swear before God that, come what may, Union or no Union, such things SHALL NO LONGER BE?

O my hearers, the condition of that poor woman and her children was pitiable enough. But it was not the most pitiable thing, by any means, in this affair. Had the worst happened to her that might, had she been consigned again to slavery, still the place, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest, would still have been only, at the farthest, a little distance off. And her little ones—the alms-house and the penitentiary would have taken care of them; and in a little while they would have followed their mother to her rest. But in what terms shall be depicted our own miserable condition! Here we are, lapped in comfort, surrounded by mothers, sisters and children, bound by most tender ties, amidst the blazing light of a nineteenth Christian century, on a soil, consecrated by the tears and blood and memorials of the most splendid and successful struggle for Humanity the world has ever witnessed, yet we cannot be touched by the divine beauty of Mercy and of Liberty; so chained are we, in the inmost being of us, by inhuman prejudices, by selfishness and pride of prosperity that we can hardly feel for our own flesh; with no vigor, no life, but dead, dead while we live. It is a sight to make the angels weep in the very presence of God.

Truly, it would seem, as I have already said, that we never had any power, or, if we ever had it, that it had gone from us: power to feel, power to love with simple human affection what is humane and just; that, even when Providence is assisting us to feel by events of the most awakening character, when the Holy Spirit, through the wrongs and agonies of a poor human mother and the feeble cries of forsaken children, speaks to whatever of humanity there is in us, and searches for our hearts to fill them with its own love, our hearts are nowhere to be found.

I will not limit the resources of God's mercy. They are inexhaustible. He has events in store for us that will reach and move us, if the past and the present can not; and if tears and groans, the anguish of a mother's heart and the wailings of helpless childhood cannot touch us, he will send forth from the hiding of his Power, fiery and bloody ministers; and at their presence the mountains of our pride shall flow down and our stony natures shall be melted; and amidst trial and agony, Truth and Right shall be revealed to us in a terrible beauty, and we shall leave all and flee to them and worship and obey.

But at present we are so fettered by our selfish and worldly habits that it is hardly possible for us to feel, even in cases in which it would seem to be impossible not to feel. Thus far all the gracious aid which has been afforded us in the Providence of Heaven seems to have been all but wasted; we lie bound hand and foot in the most deplorable insensibility.

Nevertheless we still profess to desire to love God and his truth with supreme affection. We would fain feel as we ought.

Well, then, although it is true that we cannot have the right feeling, merely because we wish to have it, yet we can do something; we can do all that is needful to be done towards obtaining it. What we can do towards this end is little, but if we do that little, all will be done; for God is at hand to make good the deficiency of our power. He is here, always ready to help us, not in any

supernatural and extraordinary way, but in the plain course of nature and providence. He is supplying us with abundant and powerful causes and occasions for feeling. And as the hunger of the body may be stimulated by the exhibition of food, so the love of God is continually providing us with opportunities, placing us in situations, causing occurrences to take place before our eyes, fitted to create in us the sacred hunger for Righteousness, the love of the good, which is the spring of all power.

And the one thing we have to do is simply this: To ATTEND. Although we cannot believe or love, merely because we will so to do, it clearly lies within our ability to give attention to what sounds in our ears, to what passes before our eyes. We can command our attention if we will. Is is within our ability to say whether we will put our fingers in our ears or not, whether we will keep our eyes open or shut. He then that has eyes to see, let him see! He that has ears to hear, let him hear!

If we will only pause and consider why it is that men are so deficient in right feeling, we shall perceive that it is because, although they have eyes, yet they do not see, and ears, yet they do not hear. We think it a very small matter whether we use our eyes and ears. It is no matter of principle with us, but only of idle curiosity. If we do not happen to like what is to be seen or heard, if it does not suit our notions, our prejudices, we have not the slightest scruple—we consider ourselves at perfect liberty to walk away. And yet, in turning thus thoughtlessly away, in refusing to attend, we may wrong our own souls most fearfully. We defraud ourselves of opportunities of life and power, we know not how precious. On such occasions, of little moment as we may think them, we seal our own doom. Then the Judge was seated and the Book was opened and the sentence was pronounced at the dread invisible tribunal, then, when our feet were perhaps on the threshold of Heaven, and we knew it not, but turned recklessly away. Then we might have entered upon a new life, a new world of truth would have dawned upon us, a

new fountain of power gushed up within us. Without being aware of it, we have passed through a crisis which will determine our condition, we know not for how long; and that thoughtless act of wilful inattention consigns our mind to a darkness that deepens at every step, and our hearts to a spiritual stupor that shall wrap us like a shroud, and from which nothing in the usual order of things can startle us. No matter how vigorous may be our understandings, or how highly cultivated, yet if, having ears to hear, we will not hear, our hearts will become harder than the nether millstone; and mothers may be torn from their children again and again, and the most outrageous injustice be enacted, and we shall be incapable of feeling any pity. Take heed, then, I beseech you, take heed how you hear; for unto him, who exerts what power he has to hear, be it ever so little, will more power be given, but from him, who does not exert the power that he may, will be taken away—he will inevitably lose—what power he has.

It appears now that, in order to be inspired with the earnestness in the cause of the Right, which is of such vital importance, and which we all profess to desire, we can do something. We can command our attention. We can use our eyes and ears, and give heed to all those occurrences by which God acts upon our nature to awaken our sympathies and inspire us with his own omnipotent spirit. Here then is one thing we can do. Do, my hearers, give it your consideration.

In addition, we can invigorate the true spirit by being faithful to it, when it exists within us in any degree. We can do something to keep it from being quenched. What we know to be right, let us commit ourselves to that; and then we shall find ourselves growing strong, when we have rendered the smallest service to Truth and Right. Remember the wise injunction: Do what you know you should, and a new light will shine upon your path, a new life animate you. Unlike the appetite of the body, the hunger of the soul is stimulated by being fed; it is not satisfied. 'Blessed

are they who hunger after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Filled—with what? Filled with that supreme desire, that absorbing love of what is good, which is at once the eternal hunger and the infinite satisfaction of the soul. Again therefore I say, commit youself to the great cause of God and Humanity. Speak for it. Stand up for it. Do not be, like the politicians, forever under the necessity of defining your position. Let your position define itself; so that no man can mistake it, let him look at it from what quarter he may, from the East or the West, from the North or the South. And then, when you find yourself irretrievably bound to the stand which you have taken, you will naturally be prompted, as every man is, who, using the powers God has given him, has a position of his own, to make good your position to yourself and to all the world; and you will find yourself growing more and more in earnest in the use of your eyes and ears and of all the faculties of thought and feeling with which you are endowed. As you grow thoughtful and earnest, as you muse, the fire will burn. You will be inspired with that pure and powerful spirit which the Almighty breathes into every true soul. Thus will come to you, almost before you are aware, the zeal, of which you once thought yourself incapable, which you profess you should like to have, but which all your wishes and professions will never bring you.

Finally, as to accomplish any good thing, we must be in earnest, as it is not enough that our reason is convinced, as we must feel deeply, it follows that, when the love of Righteousness and Freedom is awakened among us in the due strength, when the hearts of the great majority of the people are inspired by it, the giant Wrong, which now rests upon this nation, like some huge weight of granite or of iron, seeming to defy all our efforts at its removal, and actually defying all the shallow compromises of politicians, will vanish before the burning hearts of the people, like a foul vapor of the night before the beams of the morning sun. In the victorious

faith of a great enthusiasm, we shall look upon it as it flits away, and wonder where the mighty difficulty was. In the meanwhile our plain duty is to put our ourselves, promptly and cordially, in alliance with the Providence of Almighty God, who, through the events daily occurring right before our eyes, is seeking to compel and fix our attention and make us feel. Labouring together with God, we must keep our own hearts wide open for the communications of his love, and do our utmost, each in his place, to stir up the hearts of those around us, till they glow and burn with an all-conquering love of Freedom, forget their sleep, their daily business and their daily bread, yield themselves up exultingly to the blessed service of wronged and hunted men, and count it infinitely better than money or office to live and die for God and the Right.

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